

catel on wommen, yet is it a fouler thyng, whan that, for swich ordure, wommen dispenden upon men hir catel and substaunce. This synne, as seith the prophete, bireveth man and womman hir goode fame, and al hire honour; and it is ful plesaunt to the devel; for therby wynneth he the mooste partie of this world. And, right as a merchant deliteth hym moost in chaffare that he hath moost advantage of, right so deliteth the fend in this ordure.

THIS is that oother hand of the devel, with five fyngres, to cacche the peple to his vileynye. The firste fynger is the fool lookyng of the fool womman, and of the fool man, that sleeth right as the basilicok sleeth folk by the venym of his sighte; for the covetise of eyen folweth the covetise of the herte. The seconde fynger is the vileyns touchyng in wikkede manere; and therefore, seith Salomon: that whoso toucheth and handleth a womman, he fareth lyk hym that handleth the scorpion that styngeth and sodeynly sleeth thurgh his envynmyng; as whoso toucheth warm pych, it shent his fyngres. The thridde, is foule wordes, that fareth lyk fyr, that right anon brenneth the herte. The fourthe fynger is the kysyng; and trewely he were a greet fool that wolde kisse the mouth of a brennyng ovne, or of a fourneys. And moore fooler been they that kissen in vileynye; for that mouth is the mouth of helle: & namely thise olde dardardes holours, yet wol they kisse though they may nat do, and smatre hem. Certes, they been lyk to houndes; for an hound whan he comth by the roser, or by othere beautees, though he may nat pisse, yet wole he heve up his leg and make a contenance to pisse. And for that many man weneth that he may nat synne, for no likerousnesse that he dooth with his wyf; certes, that opinioun is fals. God woot, a man may sleen hymself with his owene knyf, and make hymself dronken of his owene tonne. Certes, be it wyf, be it child, or any worldly thyng that he loveth bifrom God, it is his mawmet, and he is an ydolastre. Man sholde loven his wyf by discrecioun, patiently & atemprely; and thanne is she as though it were his suster. The fifthe fynger of the develes hand is the stynkyng dede of lecherie. Certes, the five fyngres of glotonie the feend put in the wombe of a man, & with his five fyngres of lecherie he gripeth hym by the reynes, for to throwen hym into the fourneys of helle; theas they shul han the fyr and the wormes that evere shul lasten, & wepyng and wailynge, sharp hunger & thurst, and grymnesse of develes that shullen al to trede hem, withouten respit and withouten ende.

If lecherie, as I seyde, sourden diverse speces; as fornicacioun that is bitwix man and womman that been nat maried; and this is deedly synne and agayns nature. Al that is enemy synne destruccioun to nature is agayns nature. Parfay, the resoun of a man telleth eek hym wel that it is deedly synne, forasmuche as God forbad lecherie. And Seint Paul yeveth hem the regne, that nys dewe to no wight but to hem that doon deedly synne. Another synne of lecherie is to bireve a mayden of hir maydenhede; for he that so dooth, certes, he casteth a mayden out of the hyeste degree that is in this present lif, and bireveth hire thilke precious fruyt that the book clepeth: The hundred fruyt. I ne kan seye it noon oother weyes in Englissh, but in Latyn it highte: Centesimus fructus. Certes, he that so dooth is cause of manye damages and vileynyes, mo than any man kan rekene; right as he somtyme is cause of alle damages that beestes don in the feeld, that breketh the hegge or the closure; thurgh which he destroyeth that may nat been restored. For certes, namore may maydenhede be restored than an arm that is smyten fro the body may retourne agayn to wexe. She may have mercy; this woot I wel, if she do penitence; but nevere shal it be that she nas corrupt.

AND, albeit so that I have spoken somwhat of avowtrie, it is good to shewen mo perils that longen to avowtrie, for to eschue that foule synne. Avowtrie in Latyn is for to seyn, approachyng of oother mannes bed, thurgh which tho that whilom weren o flessh abawndone hir bodyes to othere persones. Of this synne, as seith the wise man, folowen manye harmes. First, brekyng of feith; & certes, in feith is the keye of Cristendom. And whan that feith is broken and torn, soothly, Cristendom stant veyn & withouten fruyt. This synne is eek a thefte; for thefte generally is for to reve a wight his thyng agayns his wille. Certes, this is the fouleste thefte that may be, whan a womman steleth hir body from hir housbonde, and yeveth it to hire holour to defoulen hire; & steleth hir soule fro Crist, & yeveth it to the devel. This is a fouler thefte, than for to breke a chirche and stele the chalice; for thise avowtires breken the temple of God spiritually, and stelen the vessel of grace, that is, the body and the soule, for which Crist shal destroyen hem, as seith Seint Paul.

SOOTHLI of this thefte douteth gretly Joseph, whan that his lordes wyf preyed hym of vileynye, whan he seyde: Lo, my lady, how my lord hath take to me under my warde al that he hath

in this world; ne no thyng of his thynges is out of my power, but oonly ye, that been his wyf. And how sholde I thanne do this wikkednesse, & synne so horribly agayns God, & agayns my lord? God it forbeede! Alas! al to litel is swich trouthe now yfounde.

THE thridde harm is the filthe thurgh which they breken the comandement of God, and defoulen the auctour of matrimoyne, that is, Crist. For certes, in somuche as the sacrament of mariage is so noble and so digne, so muche is it gretter synne for to breken it; for God made mariage in paradys, in the estaat of innocence, to multiplye mankynde to the service of God. And therefore is the brekyng therof the moore grevous. Of which brekyng comen false heires of tyme, that wrongfully occupien folkes heritages. And therefore wol Crist putte hem out of the regne of hevne, that is heritage to goode folk. Of this brekyng comth eek of tyme, that folk unwar wedden or synnen with hire owene kynrede; and namely thilke harlottes that haunten bordels of thise fool wommen, that mowe be likned to a commune gonge, whereas men purgen hire ordure.

WHAT seye we eek of putours, that lyven by the horrible synne of putrie, and constreynen wommen to yelden to hem a certeyn rente of hire bodily puterie; ye, somtyme of his owene wyf or his child; as doon thise bawdes? Certes, thise been cursede synnes. Understonde eek, that avowtrie is set gladly in the ten comandements bitwix thefte and manslaughtre; for it is the gretteste thefte that may be; for it is thefte of body and of soule. And it is lyk to homycide; for it kerveth atwo and breketh atwo hem that first were makid o flessh, and therefore, by the oldelawe of God, they sholde be slayn. But natheles, by the lawe of Jhesu Crist, that is lawe of pitee, whan he seyde to the womman that was founden in avowtrie, & sholde han been slayn with stones, after the wyl of the Jewes, as was hir lawe: Go, quod Jhesu Crist, and have namore wyl to synne. For, wille namore to do synne. Soothly, the vengeance of avowtrie is awarded to the peynes of helle, but if so be that it be destourbed by penitence.

NET been ther mo speces of this cursid synne; as whan that oon of hem is religious, or elles bothe; or of folk that been entred into ordre, as subdekne or dekne, or preest, or hospitaliers. And evere the hyer that he is in ordre, the gretter is the synne. The thynges that gretly aggreggen hire synne, is the brekyng of hire avow of chastitee, whan they receyved the ordre. And fortherover, sooth is, that hooley ordre is chief of al the tre-

sorie of God, and his especial signe and mark of chastitee; to shewe that they been joyned to chastitee, which that is moost precious lyf that is. And thise ordred folk been specially tittled to God, and of the special meignee of God; for which, whan they doon deedly synne, they been the special traytours of God and of his peple; for they lyven of the peple, to preye for the peple, and while they been suche traytours here preyers availen nat to the peple.

PREESTES been aungeles, as by the dignitee of hir mystere; but forsothe Seint Paul seith: that Sathanas transformeth hym in an aungel of light. Soothly, the preest that haunteth deedly synne, he may be likned to the aungel of derknesse transformed in the aungel of light; he semeth aungel of light, but forsothe he is aungel of derknesse. Swiche preestes been the sones of Helie, as sheweth in the book of Kynges, that they weren the sones of Belial, that is, the devel. Belial is to seyn Withouthen juge; and so faren they; hem thynketh they been free, and han no juge, namore than hath a free bole that taketh which cow that hym liketh in the toun. So faren they by wommen. For right as a free bole is ynough for al a toun, right so is a wikked preest corruption ynough for al a parisshe, or for al a contree.

THISE preestes, as seith the book, ne konnen nat the mystere of preesthode to the peple, ne God ne knowe they nat; they ne helde hem nat apayd, as seith the book, of soden flessh that was to hem offred, but they tooke by force the flessh that is rawe. Certes, so thise shrewes ne holden hem nat apayed of roasted flessh and sode flessh, with which the peple fedden hem in greet reverence, but they wole have raw flessh of folkes wyves and hir doghtres. And certes, thise wommen that consenten to hire harlotrie, doon greet wrong to Crist and to hooley chirche & alle halwes, and to alle soules; for they bireven alle thise, hym that sholde worshipecrist and hooley chirche, and preye for cristene soules. And therefore han swiche preestes, and hire lemmanes eek that consenten to hir lecherie, the malisoun of al the court cristen, til they come to amendement.

THE thridde spece of avowtrie is somtyme bitwix a man & his wyf; and that is whan they take no reward in hire assemblynge, but oonly to hire flesshly delit, as seith Seint Jerome; and ne rekken of nothyng but that they been assembled; bycause that they been maried, al is good ynough, as thynketh to hem. But in swich folk hath the devel power, as seyde the aungel Raphael to Thobie; for in hire assemblynge they putten Jhesu Crist out